

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

DHA-05 /060 W

-----091524 291915Z /50

R 291558Z SEP 77

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2489

INFO USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: AR, SOPN, SHUM

SUBJECT: ADEPA REPORT ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

SUMMARY: FOR THE SECOND YEAR RUNNING, THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOCIATION AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING PUBLICALLY CHARGED THAT THE GOVERNMENT ON ARGENTINA DID NOT RESPECT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND DECLARED THAT PRESS FREEDOM IS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE HAVE NOT DELEGATED TO ANY GOVERNMENT ENTITY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOCIATION (ADEPA) IN ITS ANNUAL REPORT ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED A RESOLUTION ASSERTING THAT "FULL FREEDOM OF THE PRESS DOES NOT EXIST IN ARGENTINA."

2. THE ADEPA RESOLUTION SAID THAT WHILE THE PRESS HAD RESPONDED TO THE GOVERNMENT'S CALL FOR "RESPONSIBILITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN THE HANDLING OF INFORMATION....THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RESPONDED TO OUR REQUEST FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS WITHOUT EXCEPTION. THIS MUST BE SAID AND WE SAY IT. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE

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HAVE NOT DELEGATED TO ANY GOVERNMENT, NATIONAL OR PROVINCIAL."

3. ADEPA'S REPORT ON PRESS FREEDOM, WHICH WAS COVERED RATHER GINGERLY BY THE MEDIA, CITED WHAT IT CONSIDERED TO BE A NUMBER OF RECENT VIOLATIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM, INCLUDING THE KIDNAPPINGS (DISAPPEARANCES) OF SEVERAL

PROMINENT JOURNALISTS AMONG THEM EX-PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY EDGARDO SAJON, POLITICAL NEWSLETTER ULTIMA CLAVE EDITOR RODOLFO FERNANDEZ PONDAL AND LA OPINION (TRENQUE LAUQUEN) EDITOR JUAN RAMON NAZAR. IN ADDITION, THE REPORT CRITICIZED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS CLOSING (TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY) THE NEWSPAPERS EPOCA (CORRIENTES) AND EL INDEPENDIENTE (LA RIOJA) AND "ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTIONS" AGAINST LA OPINION (BUENOS AIRES) AND DIARIO NORTE (RESISTENCIA). ADEPA REPORTED THAT THE "ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTIONS" WERE PARTICULARLY ALARMING BECAUSE "IN SPITE OF THEIR MERELY ADMINISTRATIVE APPEARANCE THEY REVEAL A NEW, SUBTLE WAY OF MODIFYING THE ORIENTATION OF THE SANCTIONED NEWSPAPERS..."

4. GOVERNMENT OBSERVERS WHO ATTENDED THE ADEPA MEETING STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS RESOLUTION. CORONEL (RET.) PEDRO QUIROGA, THE MILITARY INTERVENTOR AT TELAM, THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NEWS AGENCY, ARGUED, AS THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONTENTED ALL ALONG, THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS SHOULD NOT FAVOR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. HE ADDED THAT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SUBVERSION SEDITIOUS PUBLICATIONS CAN BE CLOSED. ADEPA REPLIED THAT ALLEGEDLY SEDITIOUS EDITORS CAN BE PROSECUTED, BUT THEIR PUBLICATIONS SHOULD NOT BE CLOSED.

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5. DURING THE ADEPA MEETING ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL VIOLA PRIVATELY INFORMED ADEPA PRESIDENT JUAN VALMAGGIA THAT HE WOULD PROVIDE HIM WITH THE NAMES AND REASONS FOR DETENTION OF ALL JOURNALISTS BEING HELD BY THE GOVERNMENT. WHETHER THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO ASSUAGE ADEPA AND HELP TONE DOWN ITS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS RESOLUTION IS NOT CLEAR.

6. THE GOA'S PRINCIPAL MEANS OF CONTROLLING THE MEDIA IS COMMUNIQUE 19 ISSUED ON MARCH 24, 1976, WHICH DECLARED THAT "ANYONE WHO THROUGH ANY MEDIUM WHATSOEVER DEFENDS, DIVULGES OR PROPAGATES ANNOUNCEMENTS OR VIEWS COMING FROM OR ATTRIBUTED TO ILLICIT ORGANIZATIONS OR PERSONS

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DHA-05 /060 W
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OR GROUPS NOTORIOUSLY DEDICATED TO SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES
OR TO TERRORISM WILL BE SUBJECT TO INDEFINITE DETENTION.
ANYONE WHO THROUGH ANY MEDIUM WHATSOEVER DEFENDS, PROPAGATES
OR DIVULGES NEWS, COMMUNIQUE OR VIEWS WITH THE PURPOSE
OF DISRUPTING, PREJUDICING OR LESSENING THE PRESTIGE OF
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ARMED FORCES WILL BE SUBJECT TO
DETENTION FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO 10 YEARS."

7. ON APRIL 22, 1976, THE GOA ISSUED A DEGREE STATING THAT
"IT IS FORBIDDEN TO REPORT, COMMENT OR MAKE REFERENCE TO
SUBJECTS RELATED TO SUBVERSIVE INCIDENTS, THE APPEARANCE OF
BODIES AND THE DEATHS OF SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS AND/OR
MEMBERS OF THE ARMED OR SECURITY FORCES, UNLESS THESE ARE
ANNOUNCED BY A RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL SOURCE. THIS INCLUDES
KIDNAPPINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES."

8. IN ADDITION, THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARIAT ISSUED AN
INFORMAL "STYLE MANUAL" INDICATED PREFERRED TERMINOLOGY
IN ARGENTINE NEWSPEAK, "PRISONER" IS A "CAPTURED DELINQUENT;"
"REVOLUTIONARY WAR" IS "SUBVERSION;" THE "ORGANIZATION
DECLARED ILLEGAL" (A EUPHEMISM FOR THE MONTONEROS) IS "A
BAND OF SUBVERSIVE DELINQUENTS SELF-NAMED MONTONEROS."

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9. THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF THESE REGULATIONS PLUS CONSTANT
CALLS TO THE MEDIA FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE
WITH "HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS" ABOUT WHAT SHOULD AND
SHOULDN'T BE COVERED AND HOW MUCH PLAY TO GIVE CERTAIN
STORIES RESULTS IN FAIRLY EFFECTIVE GOA CONTROL OF THE
PRESS. IT ALSO ENCOURAGES CONSIDERABLE SELF CENSORSHIP.
EXCEPT FOR THREE PRIVATELY-OWNED RADIO STATIONS, TV

AND RADIO ARE TOTALLY CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

10. COMMENT: THIS WAS ADEPA'S SECOND STRONG STATEMENT ON PRESS FREEDOM SINCE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT TOOK OVER IN MARCH, 1976. LAST YEAR'S ASSEMBLY CHIDED THE GOVERNMENT FOR BEING "THIN-SKINNED TO CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM" AND CONCLUDED THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN ARGENTINA EXISTS "IN SPITE OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO THE CONTRARY." ADEPA HAS BEEN ONE OF THE FEW VOICES ALONG WITH THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD AND LA PRENSA REGULARLY TO DEFEND PRESS FREEDOM HERE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL REPRESSION, ANNUAL REPORTS, THE PRESS, INFORMATION CONTROL
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BUENOS07294
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770355-0763
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Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1361413
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ADEPA REPORT ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS SUMMARY: FOR THE SECOND YEAR RUNNING, THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOCIATION AT ITS ANNUAL MEETIN
TAGS: SOPN, SHUM, PGOV, AR, ADEPA, ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d7324a4b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009